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Dirty tricks inside the Company

The Central Intelligence Agency not only played dirty tricks on foreign governments, but also, it is now alleged, carried out the odd spot of industrial espionage. The CIA is being sued for \$7.7 million in damages by the General Aircraft Corporation, which alleges that "the Company" (as the CIA is fondly called by its agents) stole blueprints of a short take-off and landing (STOL) Helioplane.

GAC (known before 1969 as the Helio Aircraft Company), says that the CIA was interested in the single-engine Helio Courier for its sneakier operations in out-of-the-way places. The Courier's ability to land on an area no bigger than a tennis court was of inestimable value in the CIA's less public ventures.

In 1958 the CIA decided to buy a number of STOL aircraft and, for the next five years, Helio Couriers were sold to the CIA front companies Air America and Air Asia. GAC claims it had no idea that the planes were being used for dropping secret agents in hostile jungles or whatever mischief the CIA was up to at the time.

Helioplane sales began to slip in the early 1960s when Air America and Air Asia began to compete directly with GAC in both US and overseas markets. Under the direction of CIA chief George A. Doole Jr, the Company's air empire expanded until its assets exceeded \$50 million.

In a meeting with Doole in 1962, the pioneer of the Helio STOL design, Dr Lynn L. Bollinger, was allegedly asked to hand over the exclusive rights, plans, jigs, fixtures and tools needed to manufacture and service Helioplanes. GAC refused. It alleges that Air Asia, of which Doole was chief executive, then planted a secret agent, Nathan Fitts, in its Washington office. In the style of the Watergate plumbers, Fitts is alleged to have stolen drawings, blueprints, reports and microfilms containing the trade secrets of the Helio. □